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ABSTRACT

This Brief Report highlights current activities focused on setting standards in education, and examines whether students with disabilities are considered when standards are set. Types of standards are distinguished, including performance standards, delivery standards, and content standards. Information on organizations developing standards in various content areas is provided. The status of standard-setting efforts is noted, critical issues to consider are discussed, and recommendations are offered. (JDD)

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Standards and Students with Disabilities: Reality or Virtual Reality?

ED 363 045

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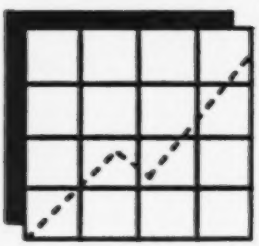

BRIEF REPORT
8

National Center on Educational Outcomes

The College of Education
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

July, 1993

EL 302501

Standards and Students with Disabilities: Reality or Virtual Reality?

Encourage people to set the highest possible standards for themselves.

Ralph Tyler

From "On Setting the Highest Standards: A Conversation with Ralph Tyler" in Educational Leadership, March 1993.

The call for higher standards in education is loud and clear. "Educational standards must be raised" is the message. We hear about the need for "world-class standards" for American students, so that our nation can be more competitive in a global economy. Will this be reality for all students in schools today?

Major standards-setting efforts now exist in most school content areas:

- Math
- Science
- History
- Civics
- Geography
- English
- Arts

Most of these efforts are funded, in part, by the U.S. Department of Education. Groups have been formed in the areas of Health and Physical Education and Foreign Language Learning. The Departments of Labor and Education are considering joint work on standards for work readiness.

Although much is happening in the standards-setting arena, there are many issues that have not been addressed. One of these issues is whether students with disabilities are considered when standards are set.

This Brief Report highlights current standards activities and related issues that will affect all students in our educational system.

Definition

Standards are statements of criteria against which comparisons can be made. These are often value statements about what is important and are

usually established for the purpose of changing an existing situation. The term "standards" has several educational uses:

- As a statement of criterion or level of achievement (**performance** standards)
- As a statement of intent or desirable characteristics for action (**delivery** standards)
- As a statement of a necessary and desirable core of knowledge (**content** standards)

The Curriculum and Evaluation Standards of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics are essentially content standards. The Professional Standards for Teaching Mathematics are delivery standards. The proposed Science standards will have three parts: content standards, for which prototypes now exist, standards for assessment, and standards for teaching.

Sample Math Curriculum Standard:

In grades K-4, the mathematics curriculum should include experiences with data analysis and probability so that students can ---

- collect, organize, and describe data;
- construct, read, and interpret displays of data;
- formulate and solve problems that involve collecting and analyzing data;
- explore concepts of chance.

From: NCTM Curriculum and Evaluation Standards for School Mathematics, 1989, p. 54

National Standards-Setting Efforts

Math standards are already published. Geography standards were released in July, 1993. Standards in science, history, and the arts are to be released in 1994. Information on several of the existing standards groups is shown on page 4.

Mathematics
The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics
1906 Association Drive
Reston, VA 22091

Completion: 1989

History
National Center for History in the Schools
231 Moure Hall
405 Hilgard Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90024
Contact: Charlotte Crabtree

Completion: 1994

Geography
American Association of Geographers, National Geographic Society
Geography Standards Project
1600 M Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20036
Contact: Anthony de Souza

Completion: 1993

Science
National Academy of Sciences
National Research Council
2101 Constitution Avenue N.W.
HA 486
Washington, DC 20418
Contact: Ken Hoffman

Completion: 1994

Civics
Center for Civics Education
5146 Douglas Fir Road
Calabasas, CA 91302
Contact: Charles Quigley

Completion: 1994

English
Center for the Study of Reading
National Council of Teachers of English
International Reading Association
174 Children's Research Center
51 Gerty Drive
Champaign, IL 61820
Contact: Jean Osborne

Completion: 1995

Arts
Music Educators National Conference, American Alliance for Theatre and Education, National Art Education Association, National Dance Association
1902 Association Drive
Reston, VA 22091
Contact: John Mahlmann

Completion: 1994

Status of Standards-Setting Efforts

Many activities are occurring around the setting of standards.

✓ **A council is being established to oversee standards-setting efforts**

This council will oversee the development of national standards. This was recommended in the Congressionally-mandated report ***Raising Standards for American Education***, released in early 1992.

✓ **Standards-setting efforts are likely to affect state-level policy**

Forty-five of the fifty states have now modified their curricular frameworks for mathematics to match the NCTM *Standards*. This is very likely to occur when standards are set in other content areas.

✓ **Many groups are setting standards**

In addition to the content area standards groups listed at left, the New Standards Project has a number of content area work groups establishing standards. The project is working with a consortium of seventeen states and six large school districts.

✓ **All students must have the opportunity to meet the standards**

As the setting of standards continues, there is growing awareness of the need to ensure that all students have the opportunity to meet the standards. The need for school delivery standards is mentioned in ***Raising Standards***, and has been supported strongly by many groups since then, including the National Governors' Association.

Critical Issues to Consider

Can standards be established that are challenging enough for students who are gifted and yet are inclusive of students with unique learning needs?

Currently, the language used in standards documents is inclusive. They talk about standards for all students. But, the suggested implementation of the standards does not seem as inclusive. For example, the New Standards Project suggests that students with cognitive impairments be excluded from its assessment efforts.

Some have suggested that different standards may need to be established for students with disabilities. It is argued that many students with disabilities will not be able to achieve the higher standards, and as a result will lose their motivation to learn. On the other hand, it is argued that different standards will encourage a separate system of education for these students.

If we set standards, will that perpetuate the tendency to exclude students with disabilities from state and national assessments?

The setting of standards leads to the need for assessments to determine whether the standards are being met. Our nation has a history of assessing students in ways that exclude those with disabilities. It is very likely that this tendency will be repeated in measuring progress on standards, unless some criteria exist to ensure that exclusion does not occur. The decision to include students with disabilities in assessments of standards will make it necessary to consider reasonable accommodations to offer, an area in which there currently is little consensus about what is reasonable or appropriate.

When a council is formed to oversee standards, it is likely that it will develop criteria about the need for standards to be inclusive of all students. Unfortunately, by the time it is formed and criteria are established, most standards-setting efforts will be well underway, if not completed.

How should standards be set, and who should set them?

Currently, the writing of standards is being done by national working groups within content areas. People with disabilities or people familiar with disability issues are not included in the writing efforts, although some standards-setting efforts (e.g., science) do have disability focus groups to review what is written.

Some national standards critics contend that standards should be set locally by those closest to the learners. These people know the needs and conditions of the community. A local approach is likely to produce much variability in standards, making them unlikely to be useful on a national level. Therefore, many people argue that standards should be set by experts who can define quality in a manner that allows for flexibility at the local level.

Recommendations

Local and service delivery professionals should learn about the standards-setting activities and how the standards affect the education and preparation of students with disabilities for participation in their school and community.

People with disabilities or people knowledgeable about disability issues should participate in the standards writing process. This includes content, delivery, and performance standards activities.

Decisions must be made now about whether to develop a single set of standards or separate standards for students with disabilities, students with limited English proficiency, and so on. Inclusive language in one phase must be followed by inclusive actions in later phases of these efforts.

Assessment systems to monitor progress toward standards must be inclusive of all students, and must allow reasonable accommodations in testing programs.

Resources

National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. (1988). Curriculum and Evaluation Standards for School Mathematics. Reston, VA: NCTM.

National Council on Educational Standards and Testing. (1992). Raising Standards for American Education. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

The New Standards Project is a joint effort of the Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh and the Center for Education and the Economy in Washington, DC.

Other Available NCEO Brief Reports

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4. Improving Student Achievement and Citizenship
5. Being First in the World in Science and Mathematics
6. Pursuing Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning
7. Promoting Safe, Disciplined, and Drug-Free Schools

The National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) was established in October, 1990 to work with state departments of education, national policy-making groups, and others to facilitate and enrich the development and use of indicators of educational outcomes for students with disabilities. The Center represents a collaborative effort of the University of Minnesota, the National Association of State Directors of Special Education, and St. Cloud State University. The Center is supported through a Cooperative Agreement with the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (H159C00004). Opinions or points of view do not necessarily represent those of the U.S. Department of Education or Offices within it.

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